Georgia Sheriffs' Potential 2027 Legislation

I. Sheriffs' Qualifications

We anticipate that sheriffs will again seek legislation to strengthen the qualification requirements for the Office of Sheriff by requiring that any individual seeking to qualify as a candidate for sheriff be a certified peace officer at the time of qualification. The sheriff is the chief law enforcement officer of the county and must be prepared on day one to carry out the duties of the office. Requiring peace officer certification before candidacy promotes professionalism, makes the transition between sheriffs more seamless, and ensures that those who seek this constitutional office have already met the state-mandated training requirements and standards expected of Georgia law enforcement officers.

See Senate Bill 527 (2026) by Senator Randy Robertson.

II. Housing of State Inmates in County Jails

We also anticipate that sheriffs will again pursue legislation next Session related to the housing of state inmates in county jails.

State inmates serving felony sentences, or portions of felony sentences, in county jails, as well as those being housed for felony probation and parole violations create a tremendous operational and financial strain on sheriffs across the state. County jails are intended to serve local detention needs, not function as long-term holding facilities for state corrections, community supervision, or parole. When these inmates remain in local custody for extended periods, sheriffs must continue to provide supervision, housing, food, medical care, classification, and security even though the county has limited control over when those inmates will be transferred or placed.

Every bed occupied by a state inmate is a bed unavailable for local arrests, court holds, or other public safety needs. This creates pressure on jail operations, increases classification and supervision concerns, and can contribute to overcrowding. The burden is especially difficult for smaller counties with limited bed space and staffing, but larger counties also experience cumulative strain through higher overtime costs, added liability exposure, and increased demands on jail staff.

One of the most significant strains involves the costs associated with transportation, medical care, and mental health services. Moving state inmates to state facilities requires deputies, vehicles, fuel, security planning, and time away from other essential duties such as patrol, courthouse security, civil process, and jail operations. Medical and mental health costs can be sudden and substantial, particularly when inmates require emergency treatment, medication, hospital visits, or specialized care. When state reimbursements do not reflect the true cost of custody, local taxpayers effectively subsidize state responsibilities.

At its core, this issue is about the state fulfilling its obligations. Sheriffs steadfastly accept their duty to operate safe and secure jails, but they need timely transfers, adequate reimbursement, and financial support for medical and mental health care costs when housing individuals who are legally the responsibility of the state. Addressing these challenges protects local taxpayers, reduces overcrowding pressures, improves jail management, and allows county jails to remain focused on their intended local public safety mission.

Last Session, sheriffs made House Bill 997 by Rep. Rob Leverett a priority. House Bill 997 would:

- Increase the per diem the state reimburses counties for housing state inmates in county jails.

- Prohibit felony sentences, or any portion of a felony sentence, from being served in county jails.

- Cap the length of time a state inmate who violates their felony probation or parole is allowed to be housed in a county jail, pending transfer.

- Prohibit sheriffs from being ordered to transport state inmates from the county jail to their state-assigned place of detention.

- Require reimbursement for certain medical and mental health care costs associated with state inmates who are being housed in a county jail on a felony parole warrant or while awaiting a probation or parole revocation.

See House Bill 997 (2026) by Rep. Rob Leverett.

III. Mugshots and Law Enforcement Videos

Many sheriffs have already expressed a strong interest in pursuing legislation again next year similar to Senate Bill 482 last Session by Senator Brian Strickland to address the growing number of records requests they receive for booking photographs, body-worn camera footage, and in-car camera video. These requests are often submitted as blanket requests by individuals or so-called news outlets that have no connection with the cases to which the photographs or videos relate and are often used for commercial purposes rather than to advance public accountability.

Testimony by sheriffs on Senate Bill 482 last Session highlighted concerns that some entities profit from arrest photographs, sensational video, or tragedy while local agencies absorb the time and cost required for review, redaction, legal compliance, and response.

Sheriffs remain committed to transparency and the public's lawful right of access to records, but their limited personnel and resources should not be exploited to subsidize efforts that sensationalize arrests, publicly shame individuals, or generate profit without advancing legitimate public accountability. A balanced legislative approach should preserve legitimate access for the public and the press while discouraging bulk or commercial requests that impose unnecessary costs on local agencies and the taxpayers who fund them.

See Senate Bill 482 (2026) by Senator Brian Strickland.

IV. Automated License Plate Readers (ALPRs)

Given recent events, GSA and GACP worked together to create an ad hoc working group of sheriffs and chiefs of police to discuss the growing likelihood of legislative action next Session related to ALPRs and how their data is stored, protected, accessed, and used.

Discussion among the sheriffs and chiefs reflected broad consensus that agencies should act proactively by developing a clear, practical framework in advance of any legislative proposal(s). The sheriffs and chiefs further agreed that the preferred approach is to preserve local control, avoid unnecessary state oversight, and demonstrate that sheriffs and police chiefs can responsibly govern ALPR use through consistent policies, training, access controls, audits, and accountability measures.

Sheriffs and chiefs emphasized the fact that ALPRs remain valuable public safety tools, but recent misuse and negative attention have created a need for stronger safeguards and clearer expectations. Key areas identified for a policy framework include equipment and system governance, database access, user roles, case-number and search-reason requirements, data retention, audit trails, training, vendor considerations, and procedures for addressing improper use. The framework should be broad enough to apply to a wide spectrum of vendors while still setting meaningful minimum standards for agencies.

There was also consensus between GSA and GACP that adopting new ALPR standards in their respective accreditation programs may provide the best starting point for developing uniform expectations. By incorporating ALPR policy, training, and audit requirements into their programs, agencies can establish a credible model that may either reduce the need for legislation or serve as the foundation for narrowly tailored legislation if action becomes unavoidable. Any legislative proposal should remain simple, broad, and focused on local accountability rather than centralized state oversight.

Recommended next steps include reviewing existing agency policies and audit practices, developing accreditation language, identifying core training and audit requirements, and preparing a unified legislative position before the next session. Proactive coordination with local government stakeholders and public messaging on the legitimate public safety value of ALPR technology will be important to maintaining trust and shaping any future policy discussion.

V. Raise the Age (Mandi Ballinger Act)

Sheriffs remain firmly opposed to any proposal that would expand juvenile jurisdiction in Georgia to include 17-year-old offenders, and they believe legislation similar to House Bill 1060 from last Session by Representative Beth Camp will likely be introduced again next year in the House. Any renewed effort should be strongly opposed because of the significant operational, fiscal, staffing, transportation, detention-capacity, and public safety burdens it would place on sheriffs and local taxpayers.

A fiscal note prepared by GSA in 2025 estimated that if 17-year-old offenders were subject to juvenile detention and transport requirements, Georgia sheriffs could face approximately $4,305,600 in additional annual costs based on 10,400 reported arrests of 17-year-olds (3,891 felonies and 6,509 misdemeanors). The report assumes each arrest would require two transports: an initial transport to a secure

Department of Juvenile Justice facility and a second transport from that facility to court for first appearance.

The largest projected cost category is deputy supervision prior to transport, estimated at $1,747,200. This reflects the statutory requirement that juveniles not be detained within sight, sound, or touch of adult inmates, requiring sheriff's offices to supervise the juvenile separately for up to six hours before transport. Vehicle-related transportation costs are estimated at $1,393,600, based on 20,800 transports, 100 miles round trip per transport, and the federal mileage reimbursement rate. Deputy personnel costs for transport are estimated at $1,164,800, assuming an average of four hours per transport at $14 per hour.

The fiscal note concludes that the combined projected costs of vehicle expenses, deputy transport time, and pre-transport supervision would create a significant unfunded burden on sheriffs' offices. It also notes that the estimate does not include potential overtime costs, including time-and-a-half pay for off-duty deputies who may be required to supervise or transport juveniles, meaning the actual fiscal impact could be higher.

In addition to the fiscal impact on sheriffs, Georgia should consider whether the Department of Juvenile Justice currently has sufficient bed space, staffing, transportation resources, and infrastructure to receive and manage the added population of 17-year-old offenders. Without adequate DJJ bed space and personnel, deputies may have to travel greater distances to secure facilities with available capacity. Expanding juvenile jurisdiction without first ensuring that DJJ can accommodate the increased population would risk shifting additional operational and financial burdens on sheriffs and local taxpayers.

Finally, supporters who argue that Georgia should raise the age simply because 47 other states have done so should take note of the states that have scaled back or raised serious concerns about these policies after implementation. Louisiana, for instance, reversed its "Raise the Age" law in 2024, once again treating 17-year-olds as adults in the criminal justice system. North Carolina has also amended its "Raise the Age" framework by requiring 16- and 17-year-olds charged with certain serious felonies to begin their cases in adult court. In New York, law enforcement officials and policy observers have raised concerns about youth gun violence following implementation of Raise the Age, including reports involving minors carrying illegal firearms, teenage shooting victims, and teen shooter arrests. These developments underscore the importance of fully evaluating public safety, detention capacity, staffing, transportation, violent-crime trends, and fiscal impacts before expanding juvenile jurisdiction in Georgia.

See HB 1060 (2026) by Representative Beth Camp.

VI. Digital Drivers Licenses

Sheriffs continue to have serious concerns with the upcoming July 1, 2027, deadline for having to procure card readers or smart phones for their deputies in order to accept a driver's license presented in a digital format. It is our belief that sheriffs will again try to amend the statute next year that will, at the very least, delay the effective date.

The primary concern among sheriffs is officer safety and the legislature's inability to understand the practical realities of roadside encounters. Traffic stops are unpredictable and high-risk, and requiring a deputy to accept a license displayed on a wireless telecommunications device could create unnecessary confusion, delay, and confrontation. Moreover, a deputy having to handle an additional piece of equipment, especially at night, puts their personal safety at even greater risk. It is our belief that law enforcement officers should retain the ultimate discretion to determine whether accepting an electronic license (as opposed to the actual license) is appropriate under the totality of circumstances, including officer safety, the environment of the stop, and the availability of proper verification equipment.

Secondarily, there are also unresolved implementation issues and costs. It is unclear whether all agencies currently have, or can reasonably obtain, the equipment necessary to verify licenses issued in an electronic format. Any requirement that sheriffs must acquire card readers or smart phones to read a digital license should be expressly conditioned on funds being specifically appropriated by the General Assembly to cover all costs. Sheriffs should not be placed in the position of having to absorb an unfunded technology mandate. The Department of Driver Services has provided GSA with a list of vendors, with estimated equipment costs ranging anywhere from $600 to $800 per device, not including annual subscriber and support fees, which remain unknown. One sheriff estimates that it will cost his office over $600,000 just in upfront costs to outfit all of his deputies with a card reader or a smart phone.

See House Bill 296 (2025) by Representative Houston Gaines.